THE SAMBROOKS OF FISHGUARD

Thomas Sambrook was a sailor. He was born in Fishguard, Pembrokeshire in 1783 and worked in the coastal trade on the Bristol Channel, visiting ports in Wales, Ireland and the south west of England. Both of his parents were from local farming families. He married Lettice Owen, a local girl, in Fishguard in 1809.

Thomas' brother David, a farmer, had also married a Lettice Owen in nearby Llanwnda in 1805, and the two wives are easily confused in the records.

Parish registers for Fishguard and nearby Llanwnda prior to 1800 are largely missing, so the only information available on the family before this comes from those who made wills.

Both Lettice Owens were growing up in the area in 1797 when the last invasion of mainland Britain by foreign troops occurred.

A French invasion force comprising a ragtag collection of some 1400 troops sailed from France in four warships. They were intent on landing in Bristol and rallying British peasants to rebel against the government, but adverse winds took them to Cardigan Bay, where they landed on a small sandy beach beneath Carregwasted Point, near the village of Llanwnda.

The French set up base on the beach, and spent two days looting the local countryside. Up on the cliffs above, hundreds of local women and children, dressed in their traditional red tunics and tall black felt hats gathered to watch. The French mistook them for British redcoats and surrendered to a small band of local militia.

It is likely that the two Lettices and their mothers were among the crowd. A memorial stone still stands where they stood. There is a contemporary account of the events in a letter sent by a Fishguard resident to his sister –

Dear Sister
I write to you hoping that you are in good health as I am at present thanks be to God for it. The French invaded near Fishguard last Wednesday which put the Country in great confusion because they wear 14 hundred and the County gathered from all parts of Pembrokeshire near four hundred women in Red Flanes and Squier Cambell went to ask them were they to fight and they said they were and when they came near the French put down their arms and they was all took prisoners that time and are brought to Haverfordwest Friday night last... We had no more than four hundred men under arms and they thought the women Be a Ridgment of Soldiers.
Copy of a letter from John Mathias to his sister Mrs Mary Harry, who was in service at Swansea dated 27 February 1797
Carmarthen Record Office Cawdor papers 223/19, cited in The Last Invasion, Carradice,
ISBN 0 946043 33 7

Thomas and Lettice lived all their lives in Fishguard, where they had five children. They were almost certainly illiterate as the family name was spelled in

a variety of ways in official documents – Sambrook, Sambruck, Sambroke and Sambruk all occur.

In 1852, Thomas was mate aboard his ship Eliza in Mullion Bay, Cornwall when he was taken ill, and died two days later at the age of 59. His death and the subsequent inquest were reported in the Cornish Weekly Newspaper –

Inquest on the 18th instant, at Penzance, on the body of THOMAS SAMBROKE, aged 59 years. The deceased was mate of a smack, called the "Eliza," of Neath, LLEWELLYN GRIFFITHS master, and was taken unwell on Friday, the 15th instant, whilst the vessel was lying in the Mullion bay or roadstead, awaiting a fair wind to proceed on her voyage, and died there on the 17th instant. The vessel was, in consequence, taken into Penzance, for the purpose of the body being interred. Verdict - Natural Death

Thomas was buried in nearby Madron church. Lettice lived on until the age of 78 when she died and was buried in Fishguard. Of their five children, only one, James, had children.

James Sambrook was a ships carpenter who lived all his life in Fishguard. Born in 1816, he married a local girl, Martha Richard, and they spent the whole of their married life in a house on Tower Hill.

Fishguard has two districts – Lower Town, or Bottom, which surrounds the old harbour, and the much more extensive Upper Town. The two are connected by a winding lane called Tower Hill.

Martha's family lived in part of a farm near Strumble Head called Trehilyn. In recent years the farm was purchased and restored by Griff Rhys Jones, who told the story of the restoration in a television series.

James and Martha had eight children, and it was they who took the family, and the family name, from Fishguard into the wider world.

Thomas, their eldest, was a mariner who died at the age of 31. He had one son, David James, who died in the Boer War and has a memorial in Fishguard churchyard –

Erected to the memory of
David James Sandsbrook (sic)
Sergt 1st Battn Welsh Regiment
born in this town Octr 6th 1871
died March 1900 of wounds
received in action at the battle
of Driefontein in the Orange
Free State March 10th 1900

Mary, born 20 September 1844, moved to Neath, Glamorgan as a servant to Rev John Edward Jones, who had lived briefly in Fishguard before moving to Neath in 1861 to become curate there.

Alfred was also a mariner, who married in Everton, Liverpool, before settling in Cardiff with his extensive family, who all used the surname Sambruck.

Cardiff was very attractive to mariners in the second half of the nineteenth century. It had begun as an iron exporting port, and a large proportion of the

rails used in building the American railway system were exported from there. Later, coal overtook iron and Cardiff and nearby Barry became the two largest coal exporting ports in the world

Benjamin, originally in the Royal Navy, but later a merchant seaman, also eventually settled in Cardiff, where he died in an accident in 1902. His death was widely reported in the local press, including the County Echo –

On Thursday in last week Ben Sambrook of Cardiff, son of the late Mr James Sambrook of Tower Hill Fishguard, met with an accident, which we regret to announce, has since proved fatal. According to the Cardiff Echo, it appears that a steamer was being towed up to the Bute East Dock, Cardiff with a boat containing Ben Sambrook, and a man named James Bradley alongside waiting to run her rope ashore, the backwash of the tug drove the boat against the steamer's side and capsized it. Bradley managed to catch hold of a rope hanging against the steamer's side, but Sambrook was thrown into the water and disappeared. A few moments afterwards he was seen floating right astern of the vessel, and was picked up by a boat which was handy. Artificial respiration was resorted to, and eventually Sambrook was taken home. He had passed right under the steamer

David and William were also mariners in Cardiff, both using the spelling Sambruck, and a further son, James, died in infancy. The younger daughter, Letitia Sambruck, stayed in Fishguard, where she had a daughter before marrying there and having four further children.

There are about 50 families in Britain with the surname Sambruck, and the majority of them still live in Glamorgan, in and around Cardiff.

In 1866 Mary Sambrook in Neath married William Davies, a local blacksmith, who had been registered as William David at birth by his parents John and Anne David. They had moved from Carmarthen to Neath shortly before his birth. A few years later they modernised their surname to Davies. William and Mary began the process of using Sambrook as a first name for three of their four sons. James Sambrook Davies, born in 1868 was the first use, followed by Thomas Sambrook Davies in 1875 and plain Sambrook Davies in 1879, although spelling was still somewhat arbitrary. Sambrook was registered as Sambruck and baptised as Sambroock, and used the spelling Sambruck occasionally throughout his life. His death in 1951 was registered as Sambruck. William and Mary's other son was David John Davies, perhaps after his grandfather and great grandfather.

Later, Letitia Sambruck in Fishguard, whose married name was Letitia Thomas, adopted the same practice with two of her sons, although they used the Sambruck spelling consistently. David John Davies, a tinplate worker all his life, named one of his sons David John Sambrook 'Jack' Davies, and Thomas Sambrook Davies gave the name to five of his seven children. There are several other examples in the wider family.

William Davies died in 1884 of locomotor ataxy, a disease exhibited only by sufferers from syphilis, between 2 and 20 years after infection with that disease. After William's death, Mary married David Llewellyn, a coal miner, and they lived together with his son and three of her children. All worked in heavy industry, coal mining or tinplate manufacture.

Sambrook Davies began his working life as a coal miner, and in 1903 married a local girl, Sarah Evans. They had two daughters, Nancy and Peggy. Sambrook was clearly a man of ambition. In 1911 he was mining coal, but by 1914 was running a rooming house in Wind St, Neath. In that year a local paper reported –

Nathaniel Smith a navvy, was this morning found dead at Sambrook Davies' Lodging-house, Wind-street, Neath - The Cambria Daily Leader 2 Oct 1914

In 1921 there were 30 residents in the rooming house. By 1931, still running the house in Wind Street, he also ran a haulage contractor business, and in 1932 Sambrook Davies, Wind Street, Neath, was fined 10s for using a motor van without a reflecting mirror. Later in the same year he was in the news again –

A motor-lorry belonging to Mr. Sambrook Davies, Wind-street, Neath, and conveying colliers to the Cefn Coed Colliery, was burnt out on the new Crynant road on Saturday morning. The driver, Ivor Morris, Neath, received burns. Monday 25 April 1932 Western Mail

In 1939 Sambrook was still running the lodging house while working as a fishmonger. He died in Neath in 1951.

Although Nancy Davies married Arthur Greenslade in Neath in 1931 it appears that she did not leave any children. Peggy Davies married three times. First to Norman Edwin R Swaffield in Neath in 1939.

On her second marriage to Alfred H Loaring, also in Neath in 1947 she is indexed both as Peggy Swaffield and Peggy Davies. She had presumably obtained a divorce, as Arthur lived on in Neath until 2002. Peggy and Alfred had two sons together, Alfred born in 1948 and Bernard in 1951.

On her third marriage to Richard Edward Lewis in 1976 at the age of 55, her sons took the surname Lewis. Again there must have been a divorce, as Alfred Howel Loaring senior lived in Neath until his death in 1981.